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Descriptors-*Academic Achievement, Federal Government, Financial Support, *National Competency Tests, *Standardized Tests

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Due to the lack of any national assessment of educational achievement, the Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education (CAPE) was chartered as a nonprofit corporation to assess the quality and progress of American education, to determine the extent to which U.S. universities, colleges, and schools are meeting their responsibilities in their separate fields, and to promote public interest for improving educational quality. Nationwide achievement tests will be administered initially to 32,000 17-year-olds, or about one percent of the 17-year-old population. Subsequently, three other groups will be included--17-year-olds out of school, 26-35-year-olds, and 9-13-year-olds. The initial tests will be in the areas of writing, science, and citizenship. Standardized procedures will be used. The tests will be given simultaneously in four geographic areas (Northeast, Southeast, Central, West) and in four types of communities (large cities, middle sized cities, small cities, and rural areas). Two socioeconomic levels will be distinguished (above and below poverty) as well as both sexes. The project will be funded jointly by the Federal government and foundations. (HW)

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# WHAT'S THE SCORE ON NATIONAL ASSESSMENT?*

by George B. Brain

There is no score on national assessment; the players are still in their classrooms and the batteries are still in the bullpen. Warmup sessions have been held and skull practice has been under way for almost four years now. But the actual game of Assessment won't commence until next month. At that time the officials, principally pros from the Research Triangle Institute, will move out into the field and the Assessment Game will get under way. The first players will be the in-school group of 17 year olds--about 32,000 of them will be participating. The game will be about four hours in length but no individual player will be engaged in the activity for more than forty-five minutes. Despite the number involved at each age level the team will be difficult to make. The chances that your 17 year old son or daughter will be selected are about one in a hundred. Probably the boys who operate the totalisator machines at Las Vegas wouldn't consider these odds very good. They will prove to be quite accurate in predicting on a national basis what the results of the game might be if all schools and all players in the 17 year old group had made the team.

The game strategy will follow a stratified sampling approach. This approach is not entirely new to educators. It is the game strategy which has been used so successfully by coaches Gallup and Harris in their national opinion poll predicting contests. The random sampling technique

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should appeal to school administrators because it tends to minimize the effects of a given school or a given program in a given area of learning.

While the first contest will be among approximately 32,000 17 year olds now enrolled in school, subsequent games will follow during the summer of 1969 involving 17 year olds in the out-of-school group and approximately 25,000 young adults in the 26-35 age range. Commencing in the Fall of 1969 the Little Leaguers will have their chance at bat with 9 and 13 year old boys and girls being tapped for play. They will contest in the same three arenas--writing, science and citizenship--as the in-school group of 17 year old who participate in the opening game. Since National Assessment is being played on a Round Robin schedule, the first round will be completed when all four age groups (17-25-9 &13) have finished their play with writing, science, and citizenship. The second and third rounds will be played in the 1970 and 1971 school years. The contest in those years will be in literature, music, mathematics, social studies, reading, art, and vocational education.

Spectators typically will not be permitted on the playing field during the game. Some observers will be allowed, but basically the game will be conducted by a trained staff--the pros from RTI.

General rules of the game will require that in all areas except reading, the actual excercises for age 9 (possibly 13 and 17) will be read to the players along with the usual directions. This is being done in an effort to reduce the effects of reading skill in the non-reading areas. As a result of the experience gained during skull practice and warm up

sessions, it has been decided that a national TV-type male voice will be used for the administration of all group exercises in the national assessment games. It is also now planned that with those items requiring written responses the answers will be taped or recorded by the game official in an effort to minimize the confusing of writing skills with knowledges in the various areas of play, which, of course, will not be the case in the writing competition.

The games will be played simultaneously in four geographic areas (northeast, southeast, central, west) and in four types of communities (large cities with urban fringes, middle sized cities, and small cities, and rural areas). There will be two socio-economic levels involved, below poverty level and above, and the players will include both sexes.

The results will not be immediately available and reports will be made in a variety of ways from the technical listing of statistical results through professional interpretations which attempt to deduce the educational implications, to a reporting of general status and progress for the information of the lay public.

In a nutshell, that's what the assessment game is all about. Perhaps at this point it would be appropriate to raise the question "How did we get involved in this game of educational Olympics?"

According to Ralph Tyler it was in the summer of 1963 that a number of leading citizens who had grown increasingly conscious of the need to expand the nation's educational efforts were asking questions about the current educational status of children and adults and the progress that they were

making in the schools of America. This group found that there was not available comprehensive and dependable data about the educational population as a whole. They noted that there were reports on the numbers of schools, on buildings, teachers, and pupils and about the money expended, but there was no sound or adequate information available on educational results on the national scale. Because dependable data were not available it was observed that personal views, historical reports, and journalistic impressions were the sources of public opinion about the progress of education. As a result the schools were frequently attacked and frequently defended without there being available to those engaged in such activities the necessary evidence to support the claims of either.

Consequently, some of the concerned men and women asked the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a private foundation, to call conferences of school people and experts in the field of educational measurement to determine what might be required to meet the need for dependable information.

Following up the sense of these conferences, the Carnegie Corporation in the summer of 1964 appointed an Exploratory Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education. Ralph Tyler was asked to serve as chairman of the group.

The Committee's assignment was to confer with teachers, administrators, school board members and others concerned with education to obtain advice for the way in which a project on national assessment might be developed that would be constructively helpful to the schools. The group

was also charged with development and tryout of instruments and the possibility of the idea of assessing the progress of American education. ECAPE was formed early in 1964 and it was at that time that the Fund for the Advancement of Education (Ford Foundation) joined Carnegie in supporting the efforts of the Exploratory Committee.

As administrators I think we would have to agree that it is rather astounding that this nation spends around 50 billion dollars per year on education throughout the United States and yet there is no systematic way of measuring the effectiveness of this giant expenditure. We also would have to agree there are few accurate measurements of the relationship between costs and effectiveness that are made anywhere in the education system on a national basis and none are regularly applied even to large parts of it to measure comparative performance. As a result widespread disparities in both effectiveness and efficiency appear and continue without major corrective action. Thus it is widely believed in some quarters that public schools in the South are inferior to those in the North and other observers also believe that Eastern schools have higher academic standards than those of the West. Yet even such conclusions and observations as these are based mainly on a few national achievement tests in only a narrow band of subjects of through the casual inspection of expenditure per pupil data or personal observations.

Yet as a nation we have a wealth of facts, demographic facts, economic and production facts, statistics in agriculture and employment and infant mortality, family structure and marriage and divorce, and crime and

accident. But in the most basic and crucial area of all--in knowing how well, how fast, and how evenly the schools of America are educating or not educating the children of this nation, we are little better off than the underdeveloped countries. We seem to be working in a darkness--a darkness of our own contriving.

It is widely agreed that children who go to schools should learn how to read, write, and perform certain basic mathematical skills with at least a minimum level of proficiency. Their ability to do these things can be objectively measured by tests and compared with abilities of other children of the same age and background. But schooling is also designed to have many other impacts on children. These include creating or bolstering self confidence; inculcating certain basic democratic values; encouraging positive attitudes toward work; providing minimal skills and disciplinary habits relevant to work; and teaching the basic understandings of interpersonal relations. Measuring these things--indeed just the planning--is extraordinarily difficult. In some cases it may be impossible. Few administrators believe that these non-academic aspects of schooling are unimportant. Many believe they are more important than basic reading, writing and arithmetic.

I think we would all agree that any evaluation system should not evade trying to measure the capabilities and changes in student behavior regarding these non-academic aspects of education. Attempts should be made to develop clear definitions of the traits concerned, and descriptions of various states of proficiency concerning them. These quite logically

will be different from place to place and from individual to individual. Admittedly subjective judgments may be prominent in measurements of this kind, but programs of education are open to subjective judgments day by day.

Perhaps the main reason that educators have been so reluctant to make an objective national assessment of educational programs is the fear that the schools, the teachers, and the pupils will be made the whipping post as they were in the post Sputnik era for whatever educational deficiencies might be revealed.

Even though national assessment will not "grade" individual pupils, teachers, schools, or school systems, school officials and teachers have been frightened that the results might reflect adversely upon them. But an attitude of this kind is pure folly. It is as foolish as suggesting that we have no need for a survey of venereal disease for fear that the high rate of venereal disease might bring shame or obloquy upon us as a people. Fortunately we have put that old taboo to rest and we recognize that social disease cannot be alleviated or even attacked effectively until we know where it is and how widespread it is. Exactly the same thing is true of the progress of education--which will remain a subject of ignorant and impassioned debate nationally as long as we don't have the facts for a fair, rational and constructive dialogue to take place.

Those were the concerns that motivated the Exploratory Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education to move ahead with the task of determining the feasibility of the national assessment program. The early efforts of the Exploratory Committee encountered some difficulties. The assessment concept was confused with a nationwide individual testing program. A second fear expressed was that an assessment would enable the federal government to control the curriculum. A third fear that the assessment results would tend to stultify the curriculum by not allowing changes over the years in instructional methods and educational roles was also raised.

AASA was concerned with the governance of assessment, about the self-perpetuating nature of the Exploratory Committee, and with the proposed method for reporting the results.

The Exploratory Committee to its credit recognized the legitimacy of these concerns and they undertook constructive actions to redress them. They have demonstrated that the assessment program could not be construed as a national testing program because no individual student or teacher can make a showing. No individual student will take more than a fraction of the measurement exercise; no scores, therefore, will be obtained on an individual student's performance and he will not be assessed at any later time. Neither can the individual gain a desired end as the result of assessment such as admission to college or a scholarship.

The Exploratory Committee attacked the federal control question head on. They recommended that the program be financed by government but that the control of the program be taken out of the hands of the federal government. Thus, the only chance of any resulting federal control would be very indirect and marginal. There are so many more direct ways through legislation or administrative action that the federal government could conceivably control

education that national assessment does not seem to provide nearly the clear and present danger of federal control that some have ascribed to the program.

Educational goals are a relevant question because the objectives will determine what will be assessed. It should be made clear, however, that the project will assess what children, youth, and adults have learned; not how they have learned it. Hence, assessment is not dependent upon any particular instructional method or goal. The plan also calls for a review one year in advance of each assessment of the objectives in each field in order to identify changes and to include the new objectives following each assessment. As a result, the curriculum should not be placed in a "straight-jacket" nor should instructional efforts be skewed to the purposes or objectives of assessment.

What about AASA's concern over regional comparisons? The sampling proposed for the various matrices is so very small that it would seem almost impossible to make any kind of inter-regional comparison that would be either disturbing or harmful to any segment of the educational enterprise. There simply will not be sufficient regional data on which to base any kind of generalization that might be used for comparitive purposes.

When the Exploratory Committee filed its report on the feasibility of assessment with the Carnegie Foundation last June, it recommended that the Exploratory Committee be phased out and that a new committee with enlarged membership be established to govern the program of assessment. This recommendation was sensitive to a basic concern of AASA. As a result, the Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education (CAPE) with twenty-five members was chartered by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York as a non-profit corporation for the purpose of assessing the quality and progress of American education, to determine the extent to which the universities, colleges, and schools of the United States are meeting their

responsibilities in their separate fields, and to promote widespread public interest for the improvement of the quality of American education. The enlarged Committee met for the first time in October, 1968, and among the first agenda items to be considered by CAPE was the question of governance. CAPE being sensitive to AASA's desire of having a quasi-legal organization responsible for the governance of assessment took action at the October meeting to authorize the chairman to request the Education Commission of the States to take over the governing responsibility. Accordingly on December 9, a request was presented to the Steering Committee of ECS at a meeting in Wilmington, Delaware. ECS was asked to give careful consideration to the possibility of assuming responsibility for governance of the program of national assessment. As a result, a public hearing has been scheduled in Arlington, Virginia, for Thursday, March 13, before the Steering Committee of ECS to determine whether the Education Commission of the States should assume the overall management and administration of the national assessment program.

Assuming the ECS's action is favorable on the governance question, AASA's remaining concern would be with the method of reporting results. Again, CAPE being responsive appointed an Operations Advisory Committee to give specific attention to how the results should be reported and when they should be released. As of this writing, the Operations Advisory Committee includes three superintendents of schools who are members of AASA: John Letson, of Chicago; Norman Drachler, of Detroit; and Nolan Estes, of Dallas. OPAC has been directed to meet as soon as possible and to provide guidelines for reporting the results of assessment for consideration by CAPE at its annual

meeting scheduled for April 7, 1969. Thus, it appears that the efforts of the Joint Committee on Assessment have been fruitful and that AASA has had a direct and telling influence on the developing policies and programs of assessment.

Now a word about funding. The last session of Congress authorized the sum of $1 million for use in the assessment program. The Carnegie Foundation has supplied an additional $1 million. There is a possibility at this writing that the Ford Foundation will approve an additional $1 million grant, assuring funds for the start of actual assessment activities. The Office of Education's budget for fiscal 1970 carries a line item of $2 million for National Assessment. Current estimates indicate that it will require a minimum of 3-1/2 million dollars to carry out the program through round one. Hence, the appropriation from the federal government must be increased by an additional $1-1/2 million or the foundations must continue their support through the second year. The long range plans for the assessment program call for an expenditure of between $4 and $5 million each year. Efforts must still be made to convince the Congress that an annual appropriation of that amount should be given to the assessment project.

In summary, CAPE has developed a new and unique approach for assessing progress in education on a national scale. There are many unanswered questions in the national assessment project, not the least of which is funding. No one is certain at this point that the assessment effort will be successful or that the program will satisfy the demand for some sort of educational accounting on a national scale. There is no certainty that more than ten areas should be covered. Many educational leaders, however, are convinced that the national assessment program is the right first step to the basic improvements which are so badly needed in our American system of education.

I end as I began. There is as yet no score on national assessment. The players are being assembled, the officials are ready, and the game is about to get under way. The educational Olympics will soon be a reality for 32,000 seventeen year old boys and girls.